BLINDFOLDED

A Mystery Story of San Francisco

BY

EARLE ASHLEY WALCOTT

Then I reflected that this could not be. It was I who was wondering. Had the plans of the Unknown come to disaster through the difficulty of getting the telegraph on Sunday? The office here was closed. The Unknown, being a woman, I ungallantly reflected, would have neglected to take so small a circumstance into consideration, and she might even now be besieging the telegraph office in San Francisco in a vain effort to get word to Livermore.

On this thought I bestirred myself, and after much trouble and speech with the young man who combined in his person the offices of telegraph operator, station master, ticket seller, freight agent and baggage handler for the place. He objected to opening the office "out of office hours."

"There might be inducements discovered that would make it worth your while, I suppose?" I said, jingling some loose silver carelessly in my pocket.

He smiled.

"Well, I don't care if I do," he replied. "Whatever you think is fair, of course."

It was more than I thought fair, but the agent thawed into friendship at once and expressed his readiness to "call San Francisco" till he got an answer if it took till dark.

I might have saved my trouble and my coin. San Francisco replied with some emphasis that there was nothing for me, and never had been, and who was I, anyhow?

There was nothing to be done. I must possess my soul in patience in the belief that the Unknown knew what she was about and that I should get my orders in due time—probably after nightfall, when darkness would cover any necessary movement.

If the mission of to-day were prolonged into the morrow, what was to become of the Omega deal, and where would Doddridge Knapp's plans of fortune be found? I smiled to think that I should concern myself with this question when I knew that Doddridge Knapp's men were waiting and watching for my first movement with orders that probably did not stop at murder itself. Yet my trouble of mind increased with the passing time as I vainly endeavored to devise some plan to meet the difficulty that had been made for me.

As darkness came on, the apprehensions of danger which had made no impression on me by daylight, began to settle strongly on my spirits. I concealed my fears and depressions from the men, and with the lighting of the lamps made my dispositions to meet any attack that might come. I had satisfied myself that the rear bedroom, that faced the south, could not be entered from the outside without the aid of ladders. The parlor showed a sheer drop to the street on the west and I felt assured we were safe on that side. But the front windows of the parlor, and the front bedroom which joined it, opened on the veranda roof in common with a dozen other rooms. Inside, the hallway, perhaps eight feet wide and 25 feet long, offered the only approach to our rooms from the stairs. The situation was not good for defense, and at the thought I had a mind even then to seek other quarters.

It was too late for such a move, however, and I decided to make the best of the position. I placed the boy in the south bedroom, which could be reached only through the parlor. With him I placed Wainwright and Fitzhugh, the two strongest men of the party. The north bedroom, opening on the hallway, the veranda roof and the parlor, looked to be the weakest part of my position, but I thought it might be used to advantage as a post of observation. The windows were guarded with shutters of no great strength. We closed and secured those of the parlor and the inner bedroom as well as possible. Those of the north bedroom I left open. By leaving the room dark it would be easy for a sentinel to get warning of an assault by way of the veranda roof. I stationed Porter in the hall and Abrams in the dark bedroom, while Lockhart, Wilson, Brown and I held the parlor and made ourselves comfortable until the time should come to relieve the men on guard.

I thrust open the door to the bedroom to see that the boy and his guards were safe, and this done I turned down the light, threw myself on the floor before the door that protected my charge and mused over the strange events that had crowded so swiftly upon me.

Subtle warnings of danger floated over my sense between sleeping and waking, and each time I dropped into a doze I awoke with a start to see only the dimly-lighted forms of my men before me, and to hear only the sweep and whistle of the wind outside and the dash of water against the shutters. Thrice I had been aroused thus, when, on the borderland between dreams and waking, a voice reached my ear.

"S-s-t! What was that?"

I sprang up, wide-awake, revolver in hand. It was Lockhart who spoke, and all strained our ears to listen. There was nothing to be heard but the moan of the wind and the dash of water.

"What was it?" I whispered.

"I don't know."

"I heard nothing."

"It was a coo-hoo—like the call of an owl, but—"

"But you thought it was a man?"

Lockhart nodded. Brown and Wilson had not heard it.

"Was it inside or outside?"

"It was out here, I thought," said Lockhart doubtfully, pointing to the street that ran by the side of the hotel.

I opened the door to the dark bedroom in which Abrams kept watch. It swung noiselessly to my cautious touch. For a moment I could see nothing of my henchman, but the window was open. Then, in the obscurity I thought I discovered his body lying half-way across the window-sill. I waited for him to finish his observations on the weather, but as he made no move I was struck with the fear that he had met foul play and touched him lightly.

In a flash he had turned on me and I felt the muzzle of a revolver pressing against my side.

"If you wouldn't mind turning that gun the other way, it would suit me just as well," I said.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" said Abrams with a gulp. "I thought Darby Meeker and his gang was at my back, sure."

"Did you hear anything?" I asked.

"Yes; there was a call out here a bit ago. And there's half a dozen men men or more out there now—right at the corner."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes; I was a-listening to 'em when you give me such a start."

"What were they saying?"

"I couldn't hear a word."

"Give warning at the first move to get into the house. Blaze away with your gun if anybody tries to climb on to the porch."

Porter had heard nothing, but was wide awake, watching by the light of the lamp that hung at the head of the stairway. And after a caution to vigilance I returned to my chair.

For half an hour I listened closely. The men were open-eyed but silent. The storm kept up its mournful murmur, but no sound that I could attribute to man came to my straining ears.

Suddenly there was a cry from the hall.

"Who's there?" It was Porter's voice.

An instant later there was a crash of glass, an explosion seemed to shake the house, and there was a rush of many feet.

I leaped to the door and flung it open. Lockhart, Wilson and Brown crowding close behind me. A body of men filled the hallway, and Porter was struggling in the hands of three ruffians. His revolver, whose shot we had heard, had been knocked from his hand and lay on the floor.

The sudden appearance of four more weapons in the open doorway startled the enemy into pausing for a moment. I sprang forward and gave the nearest of Porter's assailants a blow that sent him staggering into the midst of his band, and with a wrench Porter tore himself loose from the other two and was with us again.

"What does this mean?" I cried angrily to the invaders. "What are you here for?"

There were perhaps a dozen of them altogether and in the midst of the band I saw the evil face and snake-eyes of Tom Terrill. At the sight of his repulsive features I could scarce refrain from sending a bullet in his direction.

Darby Meeker growled an answer.

"You know what we're here for."

"You have broken into a respectable house like a band of robbers," I cried. "What do you want?"

"You know what we want, Mr. Wilton," was the surly answer. "Give us the boy and we won't touch you."

"And if not?"

There was silence for a few moments.

"What are you waiting for?" growled a voice from beyond the turn of the hall.

At the sound I thrilled to the inmost fiber. Was it not the growl of the Wolf? Could I be mistaken in those tones? I listened eagerly for another word that might put it beyond doubt.

"Well, are you going to give him up?" asked the hoarse voice of Meeker.

"There has got to be some better reason for it than your demand."

"Well, we've got reasons enough here. Stand ready, boys."

"Look out!" I said to my men, with a glance behind.

At I turned I saw without noting it that Wainwright and Fitzhugh had come out of the boy's room to take a hand in the impending trouble. Lockhart and Wilson slipped in front of me.

"Get back and look after the boy," whispered the former. "We can hold 'em here."

"Move ahead there!" shouted a fierce voice that again thrilled the ear and heart with the growl of the Wolf. "What are you afraid of?"

"Stand fast, boys," I said to my men. "Wainwright, keep close to the bedroom." Then I shouted defiance to the enemy. "The first man that moves forward gets killed! There are eight revolvers here."

(To be continued.)

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MME. MARISKA-ALDRICH, NEW MEZZO SOPRANO OF THE MANHATTAN OPERA.

Among the operatic "finds" credited to Oscar Hammerstein of the Manhattan Opera House, New York, is Mme. Mariska-Aldrich, the mezzo soprano. When Mr. Hammerstein was in Paris looking for talent he accorded a hearing to Mme. Mariska-Aldrich in the presence of Melba. Neither was particularly impressed with the stranger until she began to sing, but she had not half finished her first number when Mme. Melba nodded her approval to the impresario. When the song was concluded the singer found a five year contract ready for her to sign.

OLDEN DAY SURGEONS

They Were Exempt From Jury Duty In Capital Cases.

IN A CLASS WITH BUTCHERS

Thought to Be Too Bloodthirsty to Calmly Pass on the Taking of Human Life—Executioners Performed Operations and Acted as Doctors.

When Great Britain's statute book was still in the Draconian state from which it was redeemed by Sir Samuel Romilly and the penalty of death was inflicted for the most trivial offenses, surgeons were exempted from serving on juries in capital cases.

It must not be supposed, however, that this was because their profession was believed to make them too humane for such work as was then imposed on jurymen. We are sorry to say it was for the opposite reason. They were exempted on the same ground as butchers, whose occupation, it was thought, tended to make them too bloodthirsty.

This ought not perhaps surprise us, since two or three centuries ago executioners not infrequently performed surgical operations. This seems to have been particularly the case in Denmark. At any rate, we have more knowledge on this point in regard to that country than any other.

In Janus some time ago Dr. K. Carøe of Copenhagen published a number of documents bearing on the subject. The most ancient of these bears date July 24, 1579, and is a license issued by Frederick II. to Anders Freimut, executioner of Copenhagen, granting him the right to set bones and treat old wounds. He was expressly forbidden to meddle with recent wounds. In 1609 it is recorded in the municipal archives of Copenhagen that Gaspar, the hangman, had received four rigsdalers for the cure of two sick children in the infirmary.

In 1638 Christian IV. summoned the executioner of Gluckstadt, in Holstein, to examine the diseased foot of the crown prince. In a letter addressed to Ole Worm, a leading Danish physician of the day, Henry Koster, physician in ordinary to the king, complains bitterly of the slight thus put upon him. He says that for two whole months the hangman, "who is as fit to treat the case as an ass is to play the lyre," had the case in hand, and the doctor was not asked for advice, and, although the case went steadily from bad to worse, the executioner received a fee of 200 rigsdalers and a large silver goblet—"rewards," says the doctor plaintively, "which the greatest among us would not have received had he succeeded in curing the prince according to the rules of art."

Again, in 1681, Christian V. gave a fee of 200 rigsdalers to the Copenhagen hangman for curing the leg of a page. In 1695 Andreas Liebknecht, the Copenhagen executioner, was in such repute or his treatment of disease that he wrote a book on the subject "in the name of the holy and ever blessed Trinity." In 1732 Bergen, an executioner in Norway, was authorized by royal decree to practice surgery.

Even up to the early years of the nineteenth century this extraordinary association of surgery with the last penalty of the law continued. Erik Peterson, who was appointed public executioner at Trondhjem in 1796, served as surgeon to an infantry regiment in the war with Sweden and retired in 1814 with the rank of surgeon major. Frederick I. of Prussia chose his favorite hangman, Coblenz, to be his physician in ordinary.

It might be suspected that this peculiar combination of functions had its origin in a satirical view of the art of healing, but in the records we have quoted we can trace nothing of the kind. Perhaps the executioner drove a trade in human fat and other things supposed to possess marvelous healing properties. He may thus have come to be credited with skill in healing, though the association surely represents the lowest degree to which the surgeon has ever fallen in public esteem and social position. Compared with the hangman, a gladiator and even an undertaker may be considered respectable.—British Medical Journal.

"Painting the Town Red."

"That expression, 'painting the town red,' is not," writes a correspondent, "the creation of some unknown cockney genius, as some would seem to infer. Its birth has been traced to 'The Divine Comedy.' Dante, led by Virgil, comes to the cavernous depths of the place swept by a mighty wind where those are confined who have been the prey of their passions. Two faces arise from the mist—the faces of Francesca and Paolo. 'Who are ye?' cries Dante in alarm, and Francesca replies sadly, 'We are those who have painted the world red with our sins.'"—London News.

Development.

"Remember," said the earnest inventor, "it isn't so many years since the telephone caused laughter."

"That's true," answered the man who has trouble with central. "At first it caused laughter; now it causes profanity."—Washington Star.

Proof.

Mrs. Shellpod—Hiram, some o' them there hobos hev stole the wash offen the line ag'in! Farmer Shellpod—Haow dew you know they wuz hobos? Mrs. Shellpod—Becuz they tuk everything but th' towels.—Chicago News.

If better were within, better would come out.—German Proverb.

THE RULE OF THREE.

A Superstition of the Men Who Build the Skyscrapers.

These airy crews are a generous crowd, says Ernest Poole, writing in Everybody's Magazine of men who work on skyscrapers. They earn high pay. When working full time they make $27 a week, and, like their rough brothers out on the plains, they are quick to give of their earnings. On Saturday afternoons when they line up at the pay window the Sisters of Charity are always there, and quarters and dimes jingle merrily into their little tin boxes.

Behind this generous giving is a superstitious belief that amid risks like these it is well to propitiate fate all you can, for fate is a relentless old machine, and when once its wheels begin grinding no power on earth can stop them. The "rule of three" is centuries old. You may hear of it out on the ocean, in the steel mills, in the railroad camps and down in the mines. And you find it up here on the jobs in the skies.

"Believe it?" said an old foreman. "You bet they believe it."

"Do you?" I asked.

"Well," he said, "all I can say is this: It may be a spell or it may be because the way of the whole crew is expecting it. But, anyhow, when two accidents come close together you can be sure that the third ain't very far off."

Art in the Kitchen.

Domestic and marital peace and harmony depend on the kitchen more than the dining-room table much as some dreamy idealists are willing to admit. Technical schools and hospitals are devoting more and more attention to dietetics, and in a few years housekeeping will be recognized as the result of the growth of science and art.

The Tasks for Young Men.

Tasks for retail and wholesale adjustment fall into the hands of very young men. At the outbreak of the French revolution the leading men who were destined to become its leaders averaged 31 years of age.—E. A. Ross, in "Social Psychology."